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## III.

## THE YUKON RIVER REGION, ALASKA.

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Read 12th of April, 1870.

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MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN : I propose to give, in the present paper, a brief account of a journey which it was my fortune to make, in the year 1869, through a portion of the territory of Alaska. It was undertaken under the orders of the Commanding General of the Military Division of the Pacific. That officer had been informed that early in the season a sailing vessel would be dispatched from San Francisco for St. Michael's Island, in Norton's Sound, carrying upon its deck a small steamer, which was to try its fortunes upon the waters of the great Kvichpak or Yukon river. This steamer was to collect on its way the furs of the adjacent country, and attempt to reach the mouth of the Porcupine or Rat river, near which the Hudson Bay Company had established its most western trading station, Fort Yukon.

The object of my expedition was, primarily, to ascertain by astronomical observation whether Fort Yukon is within the territory of the United States, and, secondly, to collect as much information as practicable concerning the country, its resources, trade and inhabitants.

Having made such hasty preparations as were practicable, before the departure of the vessel, I sailed on the brig *Commodore*, from the harbor of San Francisco, accompanied by my assistant, Mr. John J. Major, on the 6th day of April, 1869.

Traveling by way of Sitka and Ounalaska, at each of

which places we stopped several weeks, we finally anchored, on the 29th day of June, off the "Redoubt," on St. Michael's Island.

I shall confine myself, in this paper, principally to an account of our expedition from this point to Fort Yukon. It is true that I pass over some of the most interesting points which we visited in Alaska, but my opportunities for observation, at these places, were so limited in comparison with those of many other observers (the opinions of some of whom are entitled to the greatest respect), that I feel certain that I could make no addition to your knowledge, either by an account of what I saw, or by the opinions which I formed. The southern portions of Alaska have been comparatively well examined, while there have been very few explorers in the northern parts. I shall, however, before concluding, indulge myself in a few remarks concerning the territory generally.

Before entering upon an account of my own experiences, it will be well to mention, briefly, the sources of information which we have heretofore possessed, concerning this portion of the country.

The coast of Russian America, and the islands of the Atlantic Archipelago, have been well examined by both Russian and English navigators. The interior of the country is, however, comparatively unknown. In the year 1842, Lieut. Zagoskin, of the Russian navy, visited the region of the Kvichpak river, and, under the direction of the Russian government, made extensive explorations, remaining in the country about two years. He afterwards published a book, which I believe has been translated into German, giving the results of his observations. This book I have not been able to obtain, and consequently the little I have gathered concerning his explorations has been derived entirely from secondary sources. He traveled from the mouth of the Kvichpak river to a point a little above Nulabo, the most eastern post of the Russian Company, a distance from the sea of about six hun-

dred miles. His book was almost the only authority concerning the Kvichpak river until, in the year 1865, the Western Union Telegraph Company commenced its explorations for an overland telegraph route, which by a cable crossing Behring Straits was to connect the eastern and western hemisphere.

This enterprising company employed several hundred explorers on both sides of the Pacific; and their explorations in the northern part of Russian America have added greatly to our knowledge of this part of the continent.

To Messrs. Ketchum and Labarge, employés of this company, belongs the honor of having made, in the summer of the year 1866, the first trip by way of the Kvichpak from the coast to Fort Yukon.\* Up to this time, the Yukon river of the English and the Kvichpak river of the Russians had been supposed to be distinct streams; and they are represented on quite recent maps, the one emptying into the Arctic Ocean and the other into Norton's Sound. The exploration of Ketchum and Labarge first proved them to be one and the same stream.

In the winter of 1866-7, these adventurous travelers again made their way on the ice to Fort Yukon, and in the following summer pushed on to Fort Selkirk, a point more than six hundred miles farther up the river, and I believe the point nearest the head-waters which has yet been reached.

These gentlemen have published no account of their adventures. I have, however, had the pleasure of traveling a considerable distance on the Yukon river with Mr. Michael Labarge. Since the year 1866, he has been traveling constantly upon the river, and is probably more

\* I learn from Mr. Dall's admirable work on Alaska, published since the reading of this paper, that this honor belongs to Ivan Simonson Lukeen, an employé of the Russian Company at St. Michael's, who succeeded in reaching Fort Yukon in the summer of 1863. Mr. Dall says that "the information thus obtained was not made public."

conversant with its topography, and with the manners and customs of the native tribes which inhabit its banks, than any other living white man. I am indebted to Mr. Labarge for a large amount of valuable information which I could not otherwise have obtained.

The next expedition up the river to Fort Yukon was made by two officers of the Western Union Telegraph Company — Messrs. Frederick Whympers and William H. Dall — the former an artist who had had considerable experience in traveling in British Columbia; the latter a collector for the Smithsonian Institution. In the fall of 1866, these gentlemen crossed the portage from Unalakleet to Nulato, where they spent the winter, and started early in the spring of 1867 for Fort Yukon. Making their way with considerable difficulty in "baidarras" or skin boats, they finally reached their destination in the latter part of June, after traveling almost constantly, day and night, for twenty-nine days. They remained at Fort Yukon for about two weeks, and then, re-embarking in their light boats, they started down the river. Traveling night and day, and aided by the rapid current, they arrived at St. Michael's Island after a journey of fifteen days and a half, which Mr. Whympers terms a mere holiday excursion.

To this expedition we are indebted for a large amount of reliable information concerning the Yukon. In 1869, Mr. Whympers published his "Travels in Alaska and on the Yukon;" a book which adds to the charms of a pleasing style and excellent illustrations, from the hands of its author, the more solid advantage of perfect truthfulness.

In January, 1868, Mr. Dall published, in Silliman's Journal, some notes on the geology of the Yukon river region, which are extremely interesting and valuable, and I believe he is about to publish a book on Alaska, which will undoubtedly add still more to our knowledge of this region.

The island of St. Michael's is situated, according to Lieut. Zagoskin, in north latitude  $63^{\circ} 28'$ , and longitude  $161^{\circ} 44'$  west from Greenwich. It is about fifteen miles long and eight miles wide, and is separated by a narrow and shallow channel from the main land. While the Russian American Company occupied the country it was always a station of importance, being the principal post in Northern Alaska, and the depot of supplies for the stations on the Kvichpak river. There is no harbor at St. Michael's, but the island covers the anchorage from most of the prevailing winds. In order to reach from this point the most northern entrance to the Kvichpak river, a journey of about eighty miles must be made along the coast of Norton's Sound. But St. Michael's is the nearest anchorage to the river, the mouths of which, as far as explored, have been found too shallow even for the accommodation of vessels of small draft.

Like the coast hills, the island is principally composed of a porous volcanic rock. It has a rolling surface, covered with deep, coarse moss, and is destitute of trees or any other useful vegetation. All the wood used for fuel has to be brought from the mouths of the Kvichpak, whither it drifts from the interior.

The "Redoubt" is simply a collection of rough log buildings formed into a hollow square. It is flanked at two of its diagonally opposite corners by small towers. Outside the inclosure are two or three rough houses, put up by American traders since the transfer of the country to the United States, and a small, rude chapel belonging to the Greek church.

Our vessel lay about half a mile off the island, and scarcely had our anchor touched the bottom before we saw several boats approaching from the shore. They were the long, light "baidarras," or skin-boats, of the country, and were crowded with natives—men, women, children and dogs. The sight of a ship is not an unusual thing to the natives who frequent St. Michael's; but they

are as fond of novelty as children, and are still possessed of great curiosity regarding the manners and customs of the "Americanski." They scrambled upon our decks as if attempting to carry the vessel by storm. They seemed delighted to see us, and laughed and chatted gaily with several gentlemen who understood a little of their dialect. Many of them hung around the cabin begging for food, and they were delighted when supplied with a little salt meat and ship biscuit. Their proximity was, however, for various reasons, not pleasing to any of the senses ; but they took our impoliteness in very good part when we made them leave the cabin.

By much feeding and a few little presents, we persuaded them to favor us with one of their dances. After a display of considerable bashfulness, they struck up a monotonous chant, accompanying themselves by beating upon pans, boards and any other suitable articles on which they could lay hands. A boy and two girls then took the floor and began to dance with a shuffling step, not very intricate in character, but, nevertheless, hard to describe. This performance was accompanied by a vigorous pantomime, illustrative of the various feelings which may animate the human breast. Now they would approach each other with wild gesticulations, as if inspired with the most frantic rage, and again they would seemingly endeavor to exhibit to their sympathizing audience the effects of an ardent but unfortunate attachment, giving vent to most doleful lamentations, and assuming an expression of heart-broken woe, touching in the extreme. When fatigue-compelled the dancers to leave the floor, they were succeeded by others, who went through nearly the same performance, until finally we were glad to inform them that we had seen enough.

Before entering upon an account of our journey up the river, it may be well for me to give a brief description of these coast natives. The information which I have gathered concerning them, although meager, is quite

reliable, for it was obtained not only while making the preparations at St. Michael's for our inland journey, but also upon my return, while passing through a portion of the country which they occupy, during which time I lived among and traveled with them.

There is no permanent native settlement on St. Michael's Island. The natives belonging to the coast tribes often visit the redoubt for purposes of trade, but their various settlements are scattered along the mainland. There was, indeed, at the time of my visit, an Indian village on the island, which had an appearance of permanency, but I believe it is not occupied very long at a time by the same Indians.

The principal tribes which live along the coast of Norton's Sound, are the Kaveaks, the Malemutes, the Unalachluts and the Magamutes. The Kaveaks inhabit that portion of the sea-coast between Behring Straits and Sound Galovnia; the Malemutes are situated between the Sound and the Unalachlut river; the Unalachluts live at the mouth and along the banks of the river of that name, and the Magamutes are found from the Unalachlut river to the mouth of the Kvichpak.

These tribes often meet at St. Michael's, and consequently there is a great similarity in their language, customs, character and appearance. It is almost impossible to form an estimate of their numbers, as they continually travel up and down the coast, and are rarely met with in large parties. A Russian trader, of long experience, informs me that, in his opinion, they number about five thousand.

During the winter, these tribes live in their villages, trapping for skins in the vicinity, and making occasional trips to St. Michael's for trading purposes. In the summer they are more scattered, collecting stores of food for winter use. The Kaveaks and Malemutes, in their skin canoes, hunt the walrus and the hair seal, and, making their way into the valleys between the low coast



ranges, kill the reindeer in great numbers. The Unalachluts are engaged, during the summer, in fishing for the salmon, and the Magamutes seek the lower waters of the Kvichpak, for the same purpose.

These Indians have, in appearance, all the characteristics of the Mongolian type — a sallow, olive complexion ; the hair straight and black, the forehead low and receding, the nose broad and short, the face beardless. They are generally of small stature ; but there are among them many tall, well-built men. Most of them are vigorous and healthy, although they are subject to many of the diseases incident to reckless exposure. In all these respects, the Kaveaks and Malemutes are far superior to the other tribes, as might be expected from their more active and hazardous pursuits. Among the diseases which I found prevalent among them are consumption, rheumatism, colds, asthma and croup. Of the last-named disease, great numbers of their children die yearly.

The food of these Indians consists of fish — fresh and dried — reindeer meat, walrus, and seal meat and oil.

In summer, they travel on the rivers and along the coast in their bark and skin canoes. The birch-bark canoe is so well known that I need not pause to describe it here. The skin boats are of two kinds — the “baidark” and the “baidarra.” The “baidark” is a long, light, canoe-shaped boat, covered with the skin of the hair-seal. This covering extends over the whole top, except one, two or three holes, in which the travelers sit. The boat is propelled by the paddle, which, in the skillful hands of a native, gives it a tremendous speed. It requires great skill to manage these boats, as they are very easily capsized.

The “baidarra” is always much larger than the “baidark.” I saw some very large ones, capable of accommodating twenty or thirty persons. It is built exactly on the model of a birch-bark canoe — a strong wooden framework, pointed fore and aft, and covered with tough seal-

skin. Owing to its lightness and the ease with which it is managed, it is an admirable craft for river travel.

In the winter, the rivers still continue to be the great highways on which the natives travel with their dogs and sledges. After much acquaintance with and study of that interesting animal, the Esquimaux dog, I can say with confidence that he stands at the lowest point of the scale of comparative excellence of the canine species. He is mean, cowardly, quarrelsome and dirty. His vocabulary does not include a good, honest bark, but only a howl and a whine. In the matter of food, he is not in the least particular, either as regards quantity or quality. If provided with material, he will eat all day. If given nothing, he seems to thrive very well upon it; but in this case, boots should be hung very high at night, as he has a weakness for boots as an article of diet. He does not absolutely disdain other articles of clothing or domestic utility. The unfortunate cook of one expedition was driven to a state bordering upon distraction by the rapid disappearance of his dish-cloths — an article, the supply of which rarely equals the demand in northern regions.

A sledge-team usually consists of seven dogs, but sometimes as many as eleven are used. The odd dog is placed at the head of the team, and serves as a leader. An Indian always runs in front to show the way.

The Indians dry an immense amount of salmon, during the summer, for the winter dog-feed. This fish is found in great abundance in the waters of all the northern rivers.

The villages of these people contain from two or three to a dozen families, and are composed of rude, low houses, built of logs and covered with earth. The door is simply a small, round hole placed near the ground, so that it is impossible to enter except on the hands and knees. The fire is placed in the center of the building, and the smoke makes its way through a hole in the roof.

Their winter houses are completely under ground. Rude as these houses are, they are, nevertheless, tight and warm.

These Indians are very unclean in their habits, though much superior, in this respect, to the Kvichpak Indians, of whom I shall speak hereafter. Many of their habits are too disgusting even to be mentioned. They have no idea of comfort, few artificial wants, and consequently little industry. Such a thing as *virtue* is unknown among their women. They are all more or less acquainted with the use of intoxicating liquors, which they have been accustomed to obtain from American whalers along the coast. They do not, however, seem to use them to excess, for, while I was among them, I did not observe a single case of intoxication. Indeed, I am told that they often re-sold spirits to the Russians, among whom the use of intoxicating liquors was carried to a great excess.

Finally, these people are kind, peaceable, generous and hospitable. I had many opportunities of judging them in these respects, and am indebted to them for cheerful assistance on many different occasions.

These Indians all wear skin clothing, both in summer and in winter. The "parca" is a sort of long shirt of reindeer skin, the hair being worn outward in dry weather, and inward in wet. It has a hood attached, which forms a covering for the head, and which is usually trimmed with the "cacajou" or wolverine skin. In the summer they wear leggings and boots of reindeer skin, the latter having "moclock" or seal-skin soles. In the winter the boots are entirely of moclock, and are made with so much skill that they are completely watertight. The under lip is usually perforated under the corners of the mouth, and through these holes pieces of bone or bits of stone or metal are inserted. The women tattoo their chins in vertical parallel lines. These and the wolverine trimming are the only attempts at ornament that I noticed among these people.

The dress of the women so closely resembles that of the men, that it would be almost impossible to distinguish them, were it not for the tattooing before mentioned. The similarity is heightened by the facial resemblance of the sexes, characteristic of the Mongolian type.

Having thus briefly described the natives of the coast, I am prepared to give an account of our expedition up the river. On the 1st of July, our little steamer was successfully launched over the side of the "Commodore." The next two days were occupied with busy preparations. Two large barges, obtained at St. Michael's, were loaded with trading goods and the winter's provisions for the stations which were to be established on the river. Guns, pistols and all manner of defensive weapons were cleaned and burnished for deadly work; for, in common with most other intelligent citizens, we had perused the letters of certain individuals to the Honorable Secretary of State, and were convinced of the ferocious character of the people to whose tender mercies we were about to be exposed!

On the evening of the third, our preparations were all completed. At midnight we discharged, in honor of Independence Day, an old Russian cannon, obtained somewhere on the route, taking care to keep at a safe distance and use a very long string. Early on the morning of the "Glorious Fourth," the little Yukon puffed off with her string of barges, amid the cheers of the sailors, the dipping of flags and the firing of guns. We all felt that this commencement of our trip up the great river was an event of no little importance. Never before had a boat propelled by steam traveled on the inland waters of Northern Alaska. While engaged in their explorations, the Western Union Telegraph Company brought a small steamer to St. Michael's, but, owing to some failure in the machinery, it never was taken to the river. Whympers and Dall, during their journey, spread the report among the natives that a "fire-boat" was coming, and the news

had created great curiosity and excitement. It was pleasant to know that once in our lives we were sure of making a sensation !

Our party consisted of Capt. Benjamin Hall, commanding the steamer, Mr. Frederick M. Smith, superintendent of the company owning the steamer, Mr. John R. Forbes, engineer, Messrs. Westdahl and Labarge, traders, Mr. Lewis Parrott, of San Francisco, Mr. John J. Major, my assistant, and myself. Besides these there were three or four trappers and Private Michael Faley, Ninth United States Infantry, my "body-guard."

Our journey along the coast was altogether devoid of incident. At about three o'clock, in the afternoon, we arrived at the upper, or Aphoon mouth. This mouth is situated, approximately, in latitude  $63^{\circ} 10'$ , and longitude  $164^{\circ}$ . Steaming up against the current, which is not very strong, we reached the great Yukon itself, after a journey of ten hours. The Aphoon outlet is some forty miles in length, and has an average width of about one-third of a mile. Its banks are low and flat, and are covered with a chaparral of alder, willow and cottonwood. It is very shallow, and filled with sand-bars.

After leaving the Aphoon mouth, a journey of seven days brought us to Anvic, a point about three hundred and fifty miles above the sea, where we were to establish our first trading station. We traveled in a general direction about north-east magnetic. About sixty miles from the sea we passed Andreavski, a deserted trading station of the Russian Company, situated on the right (north) bank of the river. Up to this point the river banks continue flat and low, but here the right bank rises into hills. Here we noticed the appearance of a dark volcanic rock, and, a little above, bluffs of sandstone and slate. The river is very tortuous, and is filled with sand-shoals and islands. In this part of our voyage we passed many Indian villages, to some of which we made brief visits. The natives do not generally make permanent homes on

the banks of the Yukon, but build temporary fishing camps, which they inhabit during the summer. They are called the Primoski or Magamutes, and sometimes merely the Lower-Kvichpak Indians. I might spare you a description of these people by saying that they closely resemble the Coast Magamutes, except that they are dirtier, less energetic and more generally worthless. They live almost exclusively on fish, which they obtain from the river with little effort. I failed, however, to notice the intellectual development which, according to recent theories, should accompany this phosphoric diet. They seem to be totally devoid of ambition, energy or industry.

I cannot, however, pass by these unfortunate people without noticing an unfounded charge which has been made against them. I have seen in print an account of a journey on this part of the river, in which the barbarity and ferocity of the Lower-Kvichpak Indians are painted in glowing colors. Nothing could be further from the truth. A more inoffensive, harmless, obliging, pusillanimous, lamb-like race does not exist on the face of the globe. It is a pity that they should be charged with almost the only bad thing of which they cannot truthfully be accused. On the approach of our steamer to their villages, it was the custom of these bloodthirsty creatures to "take to" the woods, in which performance they displayed that amazing speed and activity for which the red man is so justly celebrated. They were usually accompanied by two or three dozen dogs, running at full speed, with tails very much depressed and howling lugubriously. On landing, we usually succeeded in getting within hearing of a few of them, and convincing them of our good-will by means of little presents; and, finally, they would gain courage and congregate on the shore near the steamer. But a vigorous "toot" on the whistle was usually sufficient to send them flying to the woods again.

We stopped at Anvic nearly two days, preparing

accommodations for the traders who were to remain there. It is a small Indian village, situated on the right bank of the Yukon and at the mouth of the Anvic river, an important northern territory.

The Indians who inhabit Anvic and the banks of the Anvic river, belong to the great Indian tribe which occupies the country from this point, along the banks of the Yukon and its tributaries, as far as Nulato. They very much resemble the Lower-Kvichpak Indians, although superior to them in some respects. They hunt moose, and seem to be a little more ambitious and energetic.

The village of Anvic may be described as a fair example of the more permanent Indian villages on the river. Along the shore, a fleet of bark and skin canoes is drawn up. Back of these, a number of rough frames are arranged in parallel rows, on which hang countless salmon, drying for winter use. Still further back are the houses, resembling those of the Malemutes, already described. On the left of the houses is a row of small huts, raised ten or twelve feet from the ground, on short poles. These are the *caches* in which furs and meat, obtained in hunting, are stored beyond the reach of wild animals, which may enter the village during the temporary absence of the inhabitants. On the left of the village is the dance-house, a log structure, somewhat larger and more commodious than the ordinary dwellings. The dance-house is of great social importance in every village. Here the people assemble during the winter nights, which I need not remind you contain very nearly twenty-four hours, and amuse themselves with singing, dancing and a variety of pastimes.

It is a remarkable fact that, although the Ingeletes and Lower-Kvichpak Indians have considerable intercourse, they speak entirely different languages, and are usually unable to understand each other. Even the ordinary smattering of a few words of foreign language, almost universally acquired by the inhabitants of an adjacent

region, seems to have been too great a task for their abilities.

There is no recognized form of government among them. The "staruk," or the oldest man of the village, exercises considerable authority, but as he has no means of enforcing his orders they are often disregarded. The people, however, are not quarrelsome, and they get along remarkably well without any restraining powers.

From Anvic to Nulato we traveled in a general direction about north-north-east, magnetic. The river averages about two miles in width. Without the assistance of the pencil it is impossible to represent this portion of the Yukon. Its numerous windings, its thousand islands, its bars and shoals, ever changing and shifting, baffling the traveler in his search for the channel, defy description. Generally speaking, the right bank is high, exhibiting many bluffs of sand and rock, formed by the ice-torrents in the spring. The left bank is low and level. Here and there, however, small hills are seen standing back a mile or two from the water, and a distant range of mountains, parallel to this shore, is visible almost all the way. In these mountains lie the sources of the great river Kus-cokvine.

In this and many other parts of the Yukon a curious and rapid change is going on. In the spring the ice undermines the high banks, sometimes to a distance of thirty or forty feet. On the projecting tops of the banks there are usually many trees, which, by the action of frost and water, are soon precipitated into the stream beneath; and thus the river goes on widening and shoaling, while immense quantities of drift-wood are sent down to the sea.

The sandstones and slates continue throughout this portion of the river. The hills on the right bank are generally well covered with spruce and cottonwood, occasionally intermingled with a little birch. Owing to the coldness of the winter climate, none of this timber is



of a large or even medium size. The flats on the left bank are covered with chaparral of cottonwood and willow.

We left Anvic on the 14th of July, and arrived at Nulato after a journey of three days. Nulato is about two hundred miles above Anvic, and five hundred and fifty miles from the sea. This was, as I have before remarked, the most eastern post of the Russian American Company, and the Russian trade and influence extended but little beyond this point.

This portion of the river presents nearly the same topographical characteristics as that which I have just described. The hills of the right bank are, however, higher and more rugged, and in some places the current is extremely rapid.

The only important tributary from the north is the Takaitski river, which empties into the Yukon about fifty miles below Nulato. It is unexplored, but it is said that a great many Indians dwell upon its banks.

On the south, the Shagelook river empties into a great slough of the Yukon, about one hundred and fifty miles below Nulato. This river is also unexplored, but the natives who inhabit its banks are accustomed to visit the stations on the Yukon, for trading purposes, and are described as a fine, healthy, vigorous, energetic race, far superior to the Indians of the great river.

All the natives of whom I have thus far spoken were accustomed to trade with the Russians, and came directly under the influence of the missionaries of the Greco-Russian church. This church had two establishments, one at St. Michael's and one at Ikvagmute or "the Mission," on the right bank of the river, about two hundred and fifty miles below Nulato. I was, therefore, much astonished to find no apparent traces of a salutary influence, no converts, no ideas of the Christian religion, however feeble, among the people. The absence of superstition among them was remarkable. I agree with Mr. Whymper in believing that somewhere, in the depths of their

stupidity, lies buried some faint idea of a Superior Being, overruling their destinies ; but, apparently, they present the astounding spectacle of a people totally without a worship and without a God.

After a short day's rest at Nulato, we started again, on the morning of the 19th of July, and, traveling about two hundred and fifty miles in a direction a little north of east, we arrived at Fort Adams after a journey of about five days.

Fort Adams is situated on the right bank of the river, about twenty miles below Nuclucayette, which is at the mouth of the Tanana river, the greatest tributary of the Yukon. The imposing name of *fort* is, in this case, applied to a simple log-cabin about twenty feet square, which has been erected as a trading station by Americans, since our acquisition of the territory.

The geological and topographical characteristics of this portion of the river do not differ materially from those of the portion just described. The channel is, however, less tortuous, and there are fewer islands. About one hundred and fifty miles above Nulato, the Suquonilla range of mountains commences on the right bank. It extends for about twenty miles, and describes a long, regular curve, the concavity toward the river and the extremities resting at the water's edge. The range is a succession of fine peaks and ridges, and the scenery far surpasses in beauty that of any other portion of the river.

There are a number of tributaries flowing into this portion of the Yukon, but I will mention only two—the Kuyukuk, which flows from the north and has its mouth about thirty miles above Nulato, and the Atutsacoolacushchagut, which runs from the south and enters the Yukon about twenty miles below Fort Adams. The former is remarkable on account of its size and the fact that its banks are inhabited by large tribes of Indians, who in summer have their fishing villages along this part of the Yukon. The latter I notice only on account of its

name, for I am unwilling that my arduous labors in fixing the orthography of this majestic title should be lost to the world. All preceding explorers, unwilling, perhaps, to grapple with this gigantic problem, have passed by this stream without notice.

The Kuyukuk tribe is so much larger than any other tribe on this part of the river, that the Russians have applied the name "Kuyukunski" to all the natives from Nulato to the Tanana. Indeed, the differences between the Kuyukuks and the inhabitants of the other tributaries are but trifling.

These Indians speak a language in some respects similar to that of the Ingeletes and have many of their customs. They are, however, more active and energetic, and have sometimes, although not of late years, been very troublesome to traders and the other natives. In the year 1850, they made a descent upon the Russian fort of Nulato, massacred the inmates, and completely exterminated an inoffensive tribe of Ingeletes who had their village near the fort. In this affair, Lieut. Barnard, of the English navy, who was at that place engaged in the search for Sir John Franklin, lost his life.

Starting from Fort Adams on the 24th of July, we traveled in a general direction about north-east, magnetic. As we passed over mile after mile, we observed that the current was steadily increasing, the river becoming narrower, and the hills higher and more rugged on both shores. Fifteen miles above Fort Adams, we met the current of the Tanana, which colors the water of the main river and fills it with a thousand whorls and eddies, for a long distance below the mouth of the great tributary.

Among all the tributaries which empty their waters into the Yukon, the great Tanana—the "river of the mountains"—in size and beauty stands unrivaled. For only a few miles from its mouth has it been traveled by white men. It apparently comes from the south-east; but it is believed that many miles above the explored

portion it makes a great bend from the east, its sources lying near the upper Yukon.

At the mouth of the Tanana is a large plain, called Nuclucayette. This is the trading-ground of the Tanana Indians. These tribes must be very numerous. They assemble in the spring, at Nuclucayette, where they meet the white traders. The amount of skins procured here far exceeds that taken from any other portion of the Yukon.

Of the Tananas, I know little. They are a fine-looking race, and are said to be active, intelligent and enterprising. Their clothing consists almost entirely of tanned moose-skin; and they are much addicted to the use of ornaments, such as beads and feathers.

In three days we reached the "Rampart Rapids," distant from Fort Adams about fifty miles. At the "Ramparts" the river runs through a gorge in the hills, and is narrowed to a width of about one hundred and fifty yards. Here we saw boulders of coarse granite, a ledge of which, in the middle of the stream, separates it into two narrow, deep channels. This was the only granite that we observed on the river. On the surrounding hills there are outcrops of sandstone, having a peculiar castellated appearance, from which the name "Ramparts" is derived. Through this gorge the river runs with a velocity of at least seven miles an hour.

The Tanana Indians and the Indians of Fort Yukon are occasionally met with between Nuclucayette and the Rampart Rapids. Beyond this point there are no villages until we arrive at Fort Yukon.

For a distance of about one hundred miles from this point the river winds among hills, and our course still had a general direction about north-east, magnetic. When we left the hills we entered a low, flat, sandy country covered with chaparral of willow and cottonwood, thinly intermingled with spruce and birch. From this point to Fort Yukon, a distance of about two hundred

and thirty miles, the river is filled with islands ; its windings are innumerable, and its current runs with great rapidity. It is at the same time so shallow that we had great difficulty in finding a channel of sufficient depth to admit of the passage of our little steamer. All this part of the river abounds in game. Great numbers of moose, and occasionally reindeer, are seen.

In the afternoon of July 31, we arrived at Fort Yukon, and in spite of our hostile intentions, which we immediately announced, we received a warm welcome from the inmates of the fort.

Fort Yukon has been for the last twenty years the most western station of the Hudson Bay Company. It is situated on the right bank of the Yukon, about one mile above the mouth of the Rat or Porcupine river, one of the largest tributaries. My observations, for the determination of the geographical position of this point, are not yet completely reduced and discussed, but I find it to be approximately in latitude  $66^{\circ} 34'$ , and longitude  $145^{\circ} 18'$ . This post was established contrary to a treaty between Russia and Great Britain, and was believed by the English themselves to be west of the boundary line.

The fort is a stockade, flanked by a square tower at each of its four angles. It contains three log buildings, one for the company's stores, one for officers' quarters and one for the men. These buildings are all substantial and well made, and are finished in much better style than the buildings of the Russians on the lower part of the river.

Immediately on our arrival, we put up our observatory tents and mounted our instruments, but a week of bad weather prevented any observations. On August 7th, however, I obtained very satisfactory observations of the solar eclipse ; and on the 9th, having worked an approximate longitude and found that we were about eighty miles within United States territory, we ran up the American flag.

As the river was rapidly falling, the steamer was obliged to set out, immediately, on her return to the sea. She started on the morning of August 10th, leaving Mr. Westdahl and one man, who were to remain during the winter and trade. I also remained with my little party.

The Hudson Bay Company had one officer and three men at this post. Mr. John Wilson, the gentleman in charge, is a Scotchman, who has been ten years in the service of the Company. He did everything in his power to make our stay pleasant, and was of great service to us in many ways. We met, also, the Rev. Mr. Bumpus, a missionary of the Church of England, who was traveling in this part of the country, and whose efforts, I am informed, have been productive of much good among the Indians in this vicinity. The regular missionary, Mr. McDonald, was temporarily absent.

Although I spent a month at Fort Yukon, I had few opportunities of observation among the natives. The settlements are much scattered, and at considerable distances from the post, and the Indians were, for the most part, absent in search of game for winter use.

The principal tribes which have been accustomed to trade at this post are the Kotchakutchins (or lowlanders), who live between the Yukon and Porcupine rivers, near their junction; the Ankutchins or *Gens de Bois*, and the Tatanchakutchins or *Gens de Four*, who inhabit the upper Yukon; and the Porcupines or *Gens de Rat*, who live upon the banks of the Porcupine or Rat river. These tribes are composed of the finest Indians that I have ever seen. The women are virtuous; the men are brave, manly, intelligent and enterprising. Their clothing is of moose-skin, with the exception of a few articles which they obtain by trade. They fish little, and are almost exclusively engaged in hunting the moose, which abounds in these parts, and in trapping for skins.

For a number of years, a missionary of the Church of England has been stationed at this post. The influence

which he has exerted has been of great benefit to the natives, and, although little has been done toward educating them, they far surpass in intelligence all the other tribes of the river

Taking a general view of the Indian tribes which we observed during our journey, it will be seen that they improve in appearance and character as we depart from the coast. I noticed, also, especially on the lower part of the river, that the natives who inhabit the southern tributaries are in most cases far superior to those who live upon the streams which flow from the north. These differences are undoubtedly due to various circumstances, such as the greater abundance of game in the interior and on the southern rivers, which leads the natives to engage in more vigorous and hazardous pursuits than those which are followed by the Indians of the coast and northern streams. Moreover, the Indians of the southern tributaries enjoy, without doubt, a more favorable climate, and their frequent wars with the energetic tribes which live still further south furnish them with another means of manly culture.

I must not, however, neglect to mention that there is a difference between the coast Indians and those of the interior, so marked that it seems questionable whether these tribes could have had the same origin.

The Asiatic origin of the Esquimaux and coast Indians, and, I believe, of the Aleuts and some other of the tribes of southern Alaska, seems to be generally admitted by scientific men. Mr. Whymper mentions several interesting facts bearing on this point. In the vocabulary of the Malemute language, which he compiled, there are a number of words almost identical with words of similar meaning in the languages of the Greenland Esquimaux, a circumstance which goes far to show the common origin of all these coast people. He also calls attention to the fact that intertribal trade has been carried on for years across Behring Straits between the natives of the Asiatic

and American coasts, showing with how little difficulty a colony of "Wandering Tehuktchis" might cross from Asia and populate the northern coast of America.

Mr. Whymper mentions two remarkable ocean voyages made by *junks*, in the years 1832-3, from Japan to the north-west coast of America and to the Sandwich Islands. To these I may add a third voyage, no account of which, as far as I am aware, has yet appeared.

I was informed, while at Sitka, that a number of years ago (exactly when, I could not ascertain), a large Japanese junk was driven by stress of weather into that harbor. The boat being a wreck, the governor of the Russian Company gave the crew permission to settle upon one of the islands. Here they built themselves houses and remained for several years, manufacturing various articles of use and ornament, which they disposed of among the Russians and natives. When they had accumulated the means to rebuild their boat, they returned to Japan.

This barren outline is all that I have been able to ascertain concerning this remarkable little colony. The archives of the Russian Company, now in the possession of our government, will undoubtedly furnish a more accurate and complete account.

The island which these people are said to have occupied still bears the name of Japan Island, and on it the remains of houses, unlike those occupied by Russians or natives, may still be seen. Many Japanese coins are found among the Indians, and this fact has been adduced as an argument in favor of the Asiatic origin of the tribe; but they were undoubtedly obtained from the little colony on the Island of Japan.

But, interesting as this subject is, the limits of my paper will not permit me to dwell longer upon it; and I must hasten back to my river, from which I have wandered for so great a distance.

We spent nearly a month at Fort Yukon, during which time we obtained many meteorological, magnetic and



astronomical observations. Our duties in the observatory kept us occupied during the two or three dark hours of the night, and we consequently had frequent opportunities to witness brilliant displays of the aurora borealis, which was visible on nearly every clear night during our stay.

The lights were most brilliant in the south-east or about the magnetic north, and from that quarter traveled in flashes over the sky toward the west and south. They presented the appearance of a series of delicate, transparent, silken curtains of a soft white color, brilliantly illuminated and moving through the heavens with a slow, waving motion, with many foldings and unfoldings, as if moved by gentle breezes. On one occasion they apparently came so near the earth that they seemed almost within the reach of an outstretched hand.

During these displays the suspended needle of the magnetic declinometer was drawn toward the eastward so much that the extremities apparently touched the sides of the box.

Some persons say that during these displays they have heard a low, sighing sound ; but this I have never noticed, and I am inclined to consider it an acoustic illusion. So impressive is the effect produced by these phenomena that the very stillness seems to be audible.

We stayed at Fort Yukon until the later part of August. We had hoped to be able to remain still later ; but were informed by Mr. Wilson, whom long experience had rendered a competent judge, that the weather-signs gave promise of an early close of the season, and we would have no time to spare in getting to the sea before the river should be closed.

I had made my plans to descend the river in Indian canoes, but found that, as most of the Indians were absent, none could be procured. In this state of affairs I had recourse to the talents of one "Mose," a Canadian Frenchman, in the employ of our traders. Mose was not

a professional ship-builder, but he had considerable skill in handling tools, and his wits had been sharpened by many years of life in the woods. He pondered upon the momentous problem for several days, and then fell vigorously to work. We all assisted to the best of our ability, and the result was a boat. It was not pretty ; it did not look "fast," and we had well-founded fears that it would not keep out the water. Nevertheless we all agreed that it was much superior to no boat ; so we launched it upon the broad waters of the Yukon, and named it the "Eclipse."

In this craft I started, accompanied by Mr. Major and Private Foley, on the 28th of August, bound for Redoubt St. Michael's, more than twelve hundred miles distant. We traveled in this way as far as Anvic, going into camp at night. As far as Nulato we were accompanied by two Indians, one a Kuyukuk and the other an Ingelete, who had been brought to Fort Yukon by an American trader. Arrived at Nulato, however, they could not be persuaded to depart again from the vicinity of their "happy hunting grounds," and we were therefore obliged to work our passage for the remainder of the voyage.

Moreover, the "Eclipse" did not wholly answer our fond expectations. I know not what principles of naval architecture were violated in her construction, but I am confident that during the trip she exhibited every fault which it is possible for a boat of her dimensions to possess. Nevertheless she brought us safely to Anvic, where we discovered that she had become unserviceable beyond the hope of repair.

I recall the experiences of this portion of my journey with feelings of unmingled pleasure. It was filled with small adventures, trifling hardships and healthy exertions. Every night a camp-fire of huge dimensions blazed before our little tent. Here we cooked our bacon and our "pemmican," and prepared a feast which to-day Delmonico cannot equal, to my taste. Then, after a quiet

pipe by the fire-light, we betook ourselves to bed (or rather to *blankets*), and slept the sleep known only to children, and men without care. But, tempted as I am to linger among these scenes, I must deny myself the pleasure of further description; for the length of my paper already promises to be too great a trial to your patience.

At Anvic I was unable to obtain boats suitable for travel down the river and along the coast, and, besides, the Indians were afraid to attempt such a journey so late in the season. The situation was somewhat awkward, for the little trading station had barely sufficient provisions for its three men, and we could not possibly subsist there during the winter.

In this juncture I consulted Mr. Clark, the chief trader of the station, and old Manca, the "staruk" of the village. Manca said that, during the summer months, the Indians often ascended the Anvic river to a point near its head-waters, from which they made their way by a route not very difficult, to an Indian village on the coast, about eighteen miles north of St. Michael's. He, however, expressed strong doubts as to our ability to reach this point so late in the season, since, owing to the freezing of its mountain sources, the river was very low. Mr. Clark, who has had considerable experience as a traveler in northern Alaska, was nevertheless a new-comer to this particular part of the country, and consequently declined to give any advice; but he volunteered to accompany me should I decide to make the attempt.

This being the only practicable way out of the country, I naturally did not hesitate long. Accordingly, on the afternoon of the 14th of September, having by Mr. Clark's efficient management obtained a goodly number of canoes and Indians, we paddled away from Anvic determined to make a desperate attempt to get to the coast.

We found the river very shallow, and running almost everywhere with the velocity of a mill-race. We passed several Indian villages on our way and stopped to rest and

trade, and on two occasions we slept in the Indian huts. After five days of hard labor, paddling and poling, we succeeded in reaching a point about fifty miles up the river. Here we found the water so shallow that we were obliged to abandon all hope of proceeding further in this way. But we were unwilling to turn back, and so we decided to attempt to cross the country in a straight line for Ikikiktoik, an Indian village on the coast, near St. Michael's. We therefore abandoned our tent and such other articles as we could spare, and, packing our remaining baggage on the backs of Indians, began our journey.

In this trip we passed over three ranges of hills, averaging from 1,500 to 2,000 feet in height, and through the intervening valleys and water-courses. The valleys are so swampy as to be almost impassable, and, in many places, the swamps extend to the very tops of the hills. A great part of the country is covered with a thick, coarse moss, more than a foot in depth, which renders foot-travel extremely fatiguing and difficult.

We experienced many hardships in this journey, and were reduced almost to starvation from lack of provisions. However, at the end of five days, our tribulations were ended by our safe arrival at Ikikiktoik. From thence we made our way to our ship at St. Michael's, without difficulty.

Mr. Clark accompanied us, voluntarily, throughout all this journey, and cheerfully shared all our hardships. We were much indebted to his experience and knowledge of the country for the safe issue of our somewhat doubtful experiment.

On our return voyage to San Francisco, we stopped a few hours at the Seal islands and several days at Ounaslaska, where we obtained the first news of the civilized world we had received during six months. From thence a voyage of twenty-seven days, during which we experienced a good deal of severe weather, both in Behring sea and the North Pacific, brought us to San Francisco,

where we arrived on the 6th of November, exactly seven months from the day and hour at which we sailed from the harbor.

During our journey on the Yukon, we succeeded in determining, by astronomical observations, the geographical positions of several points; and we also made a running compass survey of the river, with topographical sketches and notes, from which I hope to prepare a map of the country, which, if not very accurate, will at all events be more satisfactory than any that has yet been produced.

Owing to the kindness of Capt. Ridell, a trader at Redoubt St. Michael's, I obtained a very complete set of barometric observations at that place, which, with those taken during our journey and at Fort Yukon, will, I think, suffice for the construction of a tolerably accurate hypsometrical section of the river.

There is one question which is on the lips of almost every intelligent person who takes an interest in the prosperity of the country, to which I must give attention before concluding this paper. This question is, what is Alaska worth?

With reference to that portion of the territory in which I have most traveled, I may, perhaps, be able to give a tolerably correct answer; but with reference to other and probably more valuable parts, I feel that my opportunities for observation have been too limited to justify me in hazarding a decided opinion. Nevertheless, as many persons of much less experience in southern Alaska than myself have not hesitated to pronounce, with confidence, upon the resources of the country, I may, perhaps, be permitted to make a few remarks even on this subject.

Many resources, both animal, vegetable and mineral, have been claimed for the new territory. It has been stated, and with truth, that owing to the influence of the warm Japanese current which runs northward to Behring Straits, and then, turning southward, follows the coast,

the mean temperature in the same latitude is much higher on the Pacific side of the continent than it is on the Atlantic. With this fact as an explanation, assertions have been made concerning the capabilities of Alaska for agricultural development which my observations do not confirm. As far as the region of the Yukon river is concerned, the question may be set at rest by a simple statement. In the month of August, we ascertained, by digging at Fort Yukon, that the earth was frozen at a distance of less than two feet below the surface. I am reliably informed that this is also the case on the island of St. Michael's. As for the *gardens* which it has been said exist at the stations on the Aleutian Islands, I can only say that those which I observed were not extensive in dimensions, nor could the results be regarded as satisfactory.

It is amusing to compare the Russian statements, with reference to these islands, with the bright pictures presented by some of our own authorities. From a Russian document prepared in answer to a request from our government for information in regard to the system of division of lands employed in Russian America, I cull the following interesting extracts :

\* \* \* "The soil itself being perfectly barren, and *unfit for either agricultural or grazing purposes*, there was no reason why the natives should endeavor to extend the limits of their lands. \* \* \* Who can ever have a mind to settle in that country, where permanent fogs and dampness of atmosphere, and want of solar heat and light, *leaving out of the question anything like agriculture*, make it impossible to provide even a sufficient supply of hay for cattle ; and where man, from want of bread, salt and meat, to escape scurvy, must constantly live upon fish, berries, shellfish, sea-cabbages and other products of the sea, soaking them profusely in the grease of sea-beasts."

I might continue these uncomplimentary selections, **but**

what I have already quoted will probably suffice. This is the country of which it has been said that "gardens flourish along the coast in the Russian settlements, producing all the vegetables requisite for domestic use!"

At Sitka and Kodiak the agricultural prospects are no brighter. With the exception of a very few watery turnips and potatoes, all vegetable supplies are and always have been furnished from without the territory.

On the peninsula of Kenay, between Cook's inlet and Prince William's Sound, there are said to be a few acres, which, owing to their sheltered position, are more productive than any other part of Alaska. This favored spot is, however, unfortunately so limited that there is not quite enough for a single farm!

I have already expressed my reluctance to giving an opinion on this question, but, in view of these facts, am I not justified in reiterating a statement which has been denied, that Alaska is not an agricultural country?

Extensive forests of spruce, hemlock and cedar cover the southern portion of the territory, which will undoubtedly be of great value in the distant future. At present, they cannot compete with the vast and more accessible forests of Oregon and Washington Territory. The mineral resources claimed for Alaska are unbounded. I notice, however, that most of these valuable deposits are still classed in the category of things that are probable.

On the Stakeen river, and at some other places in southern Alaska, the discovery of gold has been reported, and some sanguine persons have even predicted, in this locality, a return of the old Californian days of 1849. Strange to say, no eager crowds have as yet flocked to this interesting region, as is the time-honored custom of California on the discovery of new and rich deposits. When it is considered that gold in traces is one of the most common occurrences in nature, perhaps our miners may be excused for delaying a little until they can obtain more accurate information.

Silver has also been reported ; but when the localities were sought where it was said to exist, they were not to be found. Native copper undoubtedly exists in various localities. A specimen of what was said to be this metal, and to have been obtained in Alaska, was exhibited to me in San Francisco. It was most unmistakably a piece of gun-metal, and appeared to have been melted and run into a hole in a stump, in order to give it a natural appearance. This material does not *usually* occur "native;" but if deposits of it exist in Alaska, I think we may regard them as an extremely valuable acquisition !

A valuable deposit of coal has been discovered on the southern coast, in the vicinity of Kodiak Island ; but in regard to its extent, I am not informed.

On the banks and in the vicinity of the Yukon river, I found no traces of mineral deposits, with the exception of a small seam of coal situated near Nulato, which was, however, altogether too limited for profitable working. An individual in San Francisco, who enjoys the credit of having founded several startling rumors regarding the wealth of the new territory, states, I am informed, that he observed *solid bluffs of copper* on the banks of the Yukon. My own examinations were necessarily so cursory that I am not prepared to say that valuable minerals do not exist in this region ; but I can state with confidence that bluffs of copper do not exist in this part of the territory.

Speaking of the mineral resources of the river, an enthusiastic writer remarks that "when the stars and stripes shall float at Fort Yukon, we may look for mines of gold and silver being discovered quite as rich as those further south." The stars and stripes now float at Fort Yukon ; any one who desires is at liberty to look for mines, and I doubt not that, when found, they will prove equal in richness to those of southern Alaska !

There are enormous quantities of salmon and other fish in the rivers of Alaska. These fish seem to increase in



richness and delicacy as we go north. They are far superior, in these respects, to any that I have seen elsewhere. It seems scarcely probable, however, that they can be profitably brought to a market while the waters of Puget's Sound and the Columbia river furnish a nearer and an abundant supply.

There are also extensive cod-banks off the Aleutian Islands and on other parts of the coast, but these fish are not, in my opinion, equal in quality to those obtained on the Atlantic coast; they may, however, become a source of considerable profit.

But it must be admitted that of all the present resources of Alaska by far the most valuable is to be found in its fur-bearing animals. Chief among these is the fur-seal, which inhabits the two small islands, St. Paul and St. George, situated about two hundred miles north of the Aleutian group. Up to this time, we have derived little or no revenue from these islands. The habits of these animals are so peculiar that they require to be hunted with great care, for, should they become alarmed, there is danger that they will leave the islands and never return. Congress has, therefore, prohibited, for the present, the prosecution of the seal fisheries until proper regulations shall have been determined upon. About 125,000 of these animals may be killed yearly without danger of diminishing the supply, and on these it is believed that a tax of one dollar per skin is as much as the government can reasonably collect.

Among the Aleutian Islands a good many sea-otter skins are obtained, but this trade is insignificant, in comparison with the seal fisheries.

With regard to the inland fur trade of Alaska it is difficult to obtain reliable statistics. As far as the region of the Yukon river is concerned, its value has been greatly exaggerated. The furs are much inferior in quality to those of Siberia. True sable does not occur; that which bears the name of "American sable" is nothing more

nor less than stone-marten. The ermine is worthless and is never sent into the market. The Russian Company, paying its employés a mere pittance, was able to prosecute the trade at small expense. The high wages required by American traders greatly diminish the profits in this business. Nevertheless the inland fur trade of Alaska cannot be regarded as of small importance, and it may be that American enterprise will, in the future, render it far more lucrative than it has been in the past.

From these remarks it will appear that it is no easy matter to prepare a balance sheet in the affairs of Alaska; but whatever may be the resources of the territory, the experience of the last two years shows clearly that they are destined to develop slowly.

A detailed statement of the receipts and expenditures on account of Alaska, during the last two years, transmitted to the House of Representatives by the honorable Secretary of the Treasury, exhibits the following interesting totals: Receipts, \$21,849.34; expenditures, in excess of cost of troops, steam cutters, etc., which would have been incurred elsewhere, \$597,789.19; revenue from the territory for two years, minus \$575,939.85. If from half this amount we deduct \$125,000, which it is hoped we may receive yearly, hereafter, from the seal fisheries of St. Paul and St. George, we have remaining, minus \$162,970 as the yearly income upon our investment of \$7,200,000 in this lucrative territory. This is the amount in coin which our government paid for Alaska, and the coolness with which Russia now demands interest upon this sum, from the time of signature of the treaty to the time of payment, is refreshing in the extreme.

I say nothing of the additional expense of a possible civil government. The people of Alaska, exclusive of those in the service of the government and the natives, number about one hundred and twenty-five. To speak mildly, the majority of these people are not, as a general thing, celebrated for a high order of intelligence or

probability. It is not probable that our government will at present indulge them in this expensive luxury.

It will be seen, from what I have said, that I am unable to take a cheerful view of the pecuniary prospects of our new territory ; but I should be sorry to have it thought that I base the value of our acquisition upon pecuniary considerations alone. There are other points of view from which this question must be examined ; other interests which, among intelligent and thoughtful men, will appear to be quite as important as matters of dollars and cents.

The position of Alaska, in a political point of view, inclosing, as it does, with Washington Territory, the possessions of Great Britain on the Pacific coast, and rendering probable an early effort to make our territory continuous, is a consideration of importance which has been discussed and admitted by all.

The question, what is to be the future of the native tribes under the new regime ? also demands serious attention. Hitherto, their only relations with white men have been with the employés of the great companies, whose duty and interest have been to preserve the most friendly relations with them. The natives, if I except the inhabitants of the Aleutian and Seal Islands, have made little if any progress toward civilization. Nevertheless, owing to this policy of kindness, they are, for the most part, peaceable and friendly toward the whites. It is a solemn question whether this state of things is to continue, or whether wrong and outrage are to follow the footsteps of our traders, until we are obliged to establish in Alaska an "Indian system" like that which has been the curse of the western plains.

I am glad to be able to look upon the bright side of this picture. There are commercial considerations, by virtue of which I believe that the trade of Alaska must fall into the hands of large and wealthy companies, whose

interest it will be to continue the kindly policy hitherto followed with such good effect.

The question often asked, whether we may not be able to diffuse intelligence among these people and raise them gradually to a higher position in the scale of existence, is one which I cannot attempt to answer. I noticed one thing, bearing on this point, among nearly all the tribes — the almost total absence of inventive inquiry. Take, for example, the article of gunpowder. Is it not astonishing that a people should depend for years for their subsistence upon this article, which they obtain from white men, and for which they regard no price as too high, and yet the questions never have occurred to them, what is it? how is it made? where does the white man get it? I do not altogether despair of the future improvement of the Indians, but, in the consideration of this question, this feature seems to me most discouraging.

Finally, I must not fail to notice that the acquisition of Alaska has opened to the American people new fields of discovery, new sources of knowledge. Before the acquisition of the territory, Russian America was to most of us a *terra incognita*; to-day the little that is known of the country is known by all, so rapidly has information been diffused and so eagerly received. Year by year we shall add still further to our knowledge of this once distant country. We shall find the sources of its mighty rivers; we shall follow the shore of the wondrous northern sea; on every hand we shall make acquisition of new and abundant treasures of science, which shall continue to enrich mankind when our lost millions have been long forgotten. If these are to be the results of the acquisition of Alaska, I am confident that, whatever may be the doubts of statesmen or the lamentations of economists, there will be consolation and satisfaction in the Hall of the Geographical Society.